

The New Era and Its Journalists: Herzen and Chernyshevsky

Russians who have no mountains at hand simply say that the domovoy [hobgoblin] has been smothering them. It is perhaps a truer description. It really seems as though someone were choking you; your dream is not clear, but it is very frightening; it is hard to breathe, yet one must breathe twice as hard, the pulse is quicker, the heart throbs fast and painfully. . . . You are hunted; creatures, not men, not visions, are at your heels; you have glimpses of forgotten shapes that recall other years and earlier ages. . . . There are precipices and abysses, your foot slips, there is no escape, you fly into the void of darkness, a cry bursts from you involuntarily and you wake up. You wake up in a fever, sweat on your brow; choking for breath, you hasten to the window. . . . Outside there is a fresh, bright dawn, the wind is rolling the mist away to one side, there is the scent of grass and forest, there are sounds and calls . . . everything that is ours and earthly. . . . And, pacified, you fill your lungs with the morning air. . . . Long live Reason! our simple earthly reason!

—Alexander Herzen, *Alpendrucken*¹

So great was the government pressure on Russian intellectual life in the reign of Nicholas, and so well attested by great writers has that repression been, that it is easy to overlook the important changes in Russian culture between 1830 and 1855. In a general

way, one can say that *obshchestvo* became larger, somewhat better educated, more self-conscious—and more critical of the government.² Russian literary culture began the great flowering that was to continue beyond the century; the works of Gogol and the early fiction of Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy appeared under Nicholas, together with the criticism of Belinsky and a good body of less important but serious literature. By 1855 the cultural despair of the 1820s and even the 1830s (“Where is Russian literature? What is the matter with us that we have no literature?”) had lifted.

Despite a student body of less than four thousand in 1855 and a succession of political and cultural traumas (especially after 1848), Russian universities were far more important in the life of *obshchestvo* in 1855 than they had been in 1825. After 1830, the universities began to become a refuge for the most cultivated segment of gentry youth, who in the previous reign would have been educated at home by tutors. And although Russian university faculties continued to provide a home for professors of limited abilities and questionable pedagogical capacities, the overall quality improved. Timofei Granovsky, together with Herzen and Belinsky the leader of the Westerners, with his chivalric sweetness and moderate Hegelian view of Western history, became a real intellectual force at the University of Moscow in the 1840s and 1850s; until his premature death in 1855, he continued to attract able young men into the ranks of the professoriate. The leading figures of the intellectual Right, Stepan Shevyrëv and Mikhail Pogodin, did not have comparable influence, but in a more limited way they, too, helped to make the university a real center of Russian cultural life.

Every student of this period is familiar with several of the famous cases when on some trifling pretext Nicholas and his censors shut down a periodical and sent the editor to jail, a mental institution, or simply off to his estate. Some may even recall the piquant comment that Nicholas scrawled in the margin of a request for permission to found a new journal: “There are many without this one.” Certainly it expressed his deepest attitude

toward journalists and all their works. Nevertheless, the best evidence³ is that the number of periodicals, their variety, and the reading public for them increased during his reign, and the situation with respect to books was similar.

Finally, one may hazard the vaguer and more risky generalization that within this periodical-reading public of some twenty thousand to thirty thousand people can be discerned, between 1840 and 1855, a definite predilection for vaguely "critical," vaguely "liberal," vaguely reformist ideas and points of view. One sees this in the success of the two principal Westernizer journals of the 1840s, the *Contemporary* (*Sovremennik*) and the *Annals of the Fatherland* (*Otechestvennye zapiski*), which together achieved close to seven thousand subscribers by the eve of 1848.⁴ The depth and toughness of this point of view should not be exaggerated. Purely frivolous journals, like the *Library for Reading* (*Biblioteka dlia chteniia*), and government-oriented publications (some scurrilously so) retained some popularity.

Russia at Nicholas's death was scarcely seething with suppressed radicalism. Still, it is clear that an important segment of *obshchestvo* was independent and critical-minded (however timidly so); such people were influential in journalism, represented in the universities and even, apparently, to a lesser extent, in the schools. Within the bureaucracy itself, attitudes were changing. Younger bureaucrats tended to be better educated, and devotion to the interests of the state as an entity was more widespread than among the older generation. In a number of ministries and other state agencies there was a cautious interest in reform.* But most important of all, virtually the whole of *obshchestvo* was sick of the stagnation and oppression which they felt had been their lot since the panic days of 1848.

The five years (1856–61) between the end of the Crimean War

*A number of recent books and articles have pointed out that the bureaucracy under Nicholas was neither static nor to be understood purely mechanically. For a brief discussion of the sociology of Nicholas's administration and the relevant citations from the recent literature, see Richard Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness* (Chicago and London, 1976), pp. 4–6.

and the Emancipation Edict saw a spectacular change in the mood and style of both *obshchestvo* and peasant Russia. The death of Emperor Nicholas, the accession of Alexander II, and the end of the Crimean War kindled the hope in Russian society that a freer and less stifling life might be at hand. The sense of relief following Nicholas's death on March 1, 1855, seems to have been almost instantaneous; it was coupled, not surprisingly, with a vague mix of hopes and fears about the future. Vera Aksakova, the daughter of the well-known writer and critic, wrote in her diary on April 11, 1855:

X In general there everywhere prevails a kind of bewilderment, an uncertainty as to what the government wants and what it will be. Everyone feels that things will be easier somehow, with respect both to clothes and things of the spirit. F. I. Tiutchev has aptly designated the present time as a *thaw*. Precisely. But what will follow the thaw? If spring and an abundant summer follow, that will be fine, but if this thaw is temporary and the freezing weather returns, then it will seem even harder to bear.⁵

Despite widespread uncertainty, however, the impression seems to have been general that an era had in fact ended, that things would never be the same again. As Nikolai Shelgunov, subsequently a prominent radical, wrote in his memoirs:

X The sovereign had died; his successor ascended the throne without shakings or disorders; the war ended; the peace seemed honorable enough; everything was quiet and peaceful and things might have reverted to the old and traditional, with a few small changes and reforms. It might have seemed in order just to rejoice and breathe freely after our military exertions and losses at Sebastopol. But in actual fact, the old could no longer repeat itself; everyone felt that some nerve had been broken, that the road to the old was closed. It was one of those beginning historical moments, for which not years but centuries prepare, and they are just as inevitable as avalanches in the mountains or heavy rains at the equator. In such cases, the individual will disappear and everyone, from top to bottom, is mastered by one general burst of vital energy. It is at first instinctive, like a deep breath after a lethargic sleep, like the first lucid awakening after a fever; but then, after the unconscious, instinctive movement

of the spirit, a condition of clear consciousness gradually develops, people come to themselves and with new strength devote themselves to new work.⁶

This view, of course, is both radical and retrospective. But the Slavophile Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov, writing to his friend Konstantin Aksakov shortly after the accession of Alexander II, gave a similar, although more cautious, estimate of the mood in *obshchestvo*:

Affairs are taking a new turn, but this turn is not without danger. A certain spirit of life and liberty has been awakened, evidently provoked by the government. . . . What will happen? All those who kept silent, all those who acquiesced in bondage when we alone dared to demand liberty and to protest against official repression—they are all excited, shouting and singing hymns to liberty of thought.⁷

The issue that more than any other defined the content of the “new era” and dominated Russian intellectual life for the next half-dozen years was the emancipation of the serfs. The crescendo of debate, discussion, and excitement really began with the speech of Alexander II to the Moscow gentry on March 30, 1856. The Emperor stated that although he did not plan to free the serfs “immediately,” he was sure that his audience would agree that it was better to abolish serfdom from above than to wait until it was abolished from below. As the government moved toward emancipation—slowly, awkwardly, agonizingly—excitement mounted. Among the peasants, the promise of *volia* (liberty) appears to have manifested itself in a steady increase in disorders and disturbances. According to the calculations of the Third Section (political police), there were 86 major episodes in 1858, 90 in 1859, and 108 in 1860. Terence Emmons, an American historian of the Emancipation, remarks of these escalating figures that

to some extent [they] merely reflected the growing nervousness of government officials, but undoubtedly rumors about the promised emancipation contributed to peasant unrest. It was widely believed, for example, that the Tsar had already declared the peasants free, but

that the *chinovniki*, or officials, and the *pomeshchiki* [serf owners] were not allowing the transmission of this news. The large majority of the disturbances in any year continued to result from peasant refusal to fulfill obligations, especially *barshchina*.^{*} Also, numerous attempts by the gentry to reduce peasant allotments, to transfer peasants to poorer lands, or to otherwise increase their demesne lands in anticipation of emancipation, must have had their effect on the rate of peasant disturbances.⁸

X The excitement in *obshchestvo* was comparably great, although of course its manifestations were quite different. L. F. Panteleev, who was a student at the University of St. Petersburg between 1858 and 1861, remembered his contemporaries as being virtually obsessed with the development of plans for emancipation. The subject dominated nearly all informal group discussions. Real knowledge of peasant life and hard economic facts about a settlement were rarely encountered in these discussions; it was simply assumed that the former serfs should be provided with "economic security." What so excited a large portion of *obshchestvo* (and the students in particular) was the notion of giving the serfs "liberty," making them human beings in the full sense of the word. "Liberty" then seemed a kind of supreme good, from which a host of subsidiary benefits might be expected to follow.

In fact, a haze of naive optimism suffused the entire period: nothing had as yet been seriously undertaken; no "contradictions" had as yet appeared. Little was known in *obshchestvo* circles about what peasants were actually like, nor was there any quick or easy way of finding out. To most proponents of emancipation the government appeared benevolent, if timid and vacillating. The full depth of the conflict of interest between the gentry landowners and the peasantry was quite obscure. Most landowners presumably sensed but could not articulate it, while their most literate and intelligent spokesmen were extremely cautious in their public utterances, since emancipation was the declared will of the Emperor.

The range of possibility seemed so boundless, largely because nothing had yet been done. Nicholas I had been a thoroughly

^{*}Labor dues, roughly equivalent to the French *corvée*.

known quantity; his successor and his successor's government were not. The motives behind Alexander's decision to emancipate were not then (indeed have never been) very well understood, vital as that decision was. In fact, the Russian government did not really know what it was or where it was going. The Emancipation itself was a "leap in the dark," compared to which the Second Reform Bill in England was the merest trifle. And the Russian government was experimenting in other areas as well: easing travel restrictions and trying out a more tolerant and permissive attitude toward the universities. Small wonder if the young and reform-minded grew jubilant and confident, while the older and more conservative drew back in uncertainty and dismay, unable even to express what they felt, since it was the autocracy—their bulwark—that was sponsoring the new era, however haltingly and incoherently.

In examining the forces that helped to shape and express the upsurge in social optimism of the late 1850s, it is important not to exaggerate the importance of radical *ideas* in this process. Primacy should certainly be given to the inchoate change in the mood of *obshchestvo* triggered by the loss of the war and the death of Nicholas. Nevertheless, *obshchestvo*'s growing receptivity to radical ideas and the emergence of key tenets of Populism are aspects of the drama that cannot be omitted. They provided something quite essential: a vocabulary for people's aspirations.

Journalism as a whole was enlivened by the social mood of the mid- and late 1850s, especially by the debate over Emancipation. For young, intellectually inclined people, journalism became one of the few obvious alternatives to a career in the universities or the imperial bureaucracy, and the relaxation of the censorship made serious, critical journalism seem more viable. Between 1856 and 1860, the total number of periodical publications in Russia increased from 110 to 230,⁹ even though many of these new journals failed to last for more than a few issues.

Of all the journals that expressed and, in turn, influenced the social mood of Russia in those years, initially the most important was Alexander Herzen's *Bell* (*Kolokol*), which began its career in 1857. Published in London, the *Bell* was smuggled into Russia

in hundreds, and for a short time in thousands, of copies per issue. The ferment in Russia was homegrown; but the *Bell* helped the Russians of the new era to express their hopes and aspirations. One cannot minimize its importance: virtually every memoir of the period mentions it at some length, with hatred or approbation, depending on the viewpoint. The *Bell*, fundamentally, did two things: it provided the only free forum for criticism and discussion of the realities of Russian life in the reform period, in particular with respect to peasant emancipation, and it introduced young Russians to the constellation of ideas that Herzen called "Russian socialism" and that we know as Populism.

The *Bell* grew naturally out of Herzen's earlier publishing ventures. He tells us himself that the idea of creating an uncensored Russian press occurred to him as early as 1849, but it was not until his involvement with continental radicalism was largely over and he was settled in London that he devoted himself seriously to the task. With the assistance of several Polish radicals, he founded in 1853 the Free Russian Press. Herzen had provided his Polish colleagues with financial backing for their propagandistic publications; in exchange, they made available to him Cyrillic type that they had acquired in Paris. By April Herzen was writing to a friend that "there will be a press, and if I do nothing more, this initiative in the direction of public discussion in Russia will be appreciated some day."¹⁰ On May 20, Herzen proclaimed in the émigré *Polish Democrat* that he intended to create a free tribunal outside the boundaries of the country. "The founding of a Russian press in London," he wrote, "appears to be the most practical revolutionary action that a Russian can take, in the expectation of being able to do other, better things."¹¹

Having made this decision, Herzen was most concerned with the matter of *contacts* in Russia, both in the technical sense of being able to reach Russians with what he wrote, to get his material into the country, and in the sense of finding an audience with whom he could make intellectual contact. His first thoughts, in the latter respect, turned to his old "Westerner" cronies of the previous decade, and for the next two years Herzen tried to get

in touch with them, both through personal letters and through pamphlets, some of which were smuggled into Russia through Poland.

The results were discouraging. Of Herzen's old friends, only the historian Granovsky showed any initial enthusiasm for the Free Russian Press and its works. The reasons for this apathetic and sometimes hostile response are not difficult to discover. Since his emigration to Europe, Herzen had moved away from the ideals that he had shared with the Westerner group of the 1840s. He had repudiated the middle-class liberals and radicals of the West. He had become more sympathetic to violent revolution as a condition of progress in Europe and in Russia. And his Russian socialism had obvious Slavophile elements in it. Some of his former friends, like the critic Vasily Botkin and the literary doctor Nikolai Ketcher, were so upset by Herzen's radicalism that they would not write to him. When the actor M. S. Shchepkin took the trouble to pay Herzen a visit in London, he ended by advising him to abandon the Free Russian Press and go to America.

Granovsky's reaction was more ambiguous. On occasion he expressed cautious approval. But in the fall of 1855, he wrote a letter to a mutual friend, K. D. Kavelin, in which he accused Herzen of childishness and impracticality; Herzen was, he said, posturing before the radicals of Western Europe by exaggerating the strength of oppositional forces in Russia. There was some truth in this charge. Wounded vanity, personal and national, played its part in the formation of Herzen's Russian socialism. But Granovsky's accusation was scarcely the whole truth, nor did it constitute a serious answer to the ideas Herzen was developing. In view of the old debate between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers, it is not surprising that it was the Slavophile component in Herzen's views to which Granovsky really took exception, in particular what Granovsky took to be Herzen's hostility to Peter the Great, who remained a hero to Granovsky and others of the old Westerner group for whom he spoke.*

*Writing in the 1870s, another Westernizer, P. V. Annenkov, developed a more fair-minded view of the relationship. The Slavophiles, he wrote, "managed to bring into the field of vision of the Russian intelligentsia a new subject, a new active element of thought—the people, to be precise; and after [their] preaching neither scholarship

In his reply to Granovsky, Herzen indignantly denied any kinship with the moribund religiosity of the Slavophiles, but he did admit—as he later did to Turgenev—to an interest in “certain of their thoughts.” He was rather vague about this interest, referring only to their belief in the Russian peasant. But there is no question that Herzen was stung by Granovsky’s linking him with their old enemies from the salon debates of the previous decade. One feels that he protested a bit too much as he heaped on the invective: the Slavophiles, he concluded, were false, dangerous “Orthodox Jesuits.” Still, he was interested in “certain of their thoughts.”¹²

The audience for his words before 1856 was small, and it was extremely difficult to get his publications into Russia. And yet, among the press’s earliest productions were some of Herzen’s most memorable pamphlets, *St. George’s Day! St. George’s Day! To the Russian Gentry** and *Baptized Property*, a full-dress attack on serfdom. But as time passed, it grew harder and harder to carry on. Herzen recalled this discouraging period in his memoirs in the following terms:

Three years of life in London had fatigued me. It is a laborious business to work without seeing the fruit from close at hand; and as well as this I was too much cut off from any circle of my kin. Printing sheet after sheet with Chernetsky and piling up heaps of printed pamphlets in Trübner’s cellars, I had hardly any opportunity to send anything across the frontiers of Russia. I could not give up: the Russian printing press was my life’s work . . . with it I lived in the atmosphere of Russia; with it I was prepared and armed. But with all that, it wore one out that one’s work was never heard of: one’s hands sank to one’s

in general, nor the science of government in particular could avoid considering it and taking it into account in their various political and social solutions. This was the great merit of the party, whatever its cost. Later, and already abroad, Herzen understood very well the importance of the structure which the Slavophiles had erected, and he used to say, not for nothing: ‘Our European Westernizer party will acquire the position and the significance of a social force only when it masters the themes and the problems put into circulation by the Slavophiles.’” *The Extraordinary Decade*, quoted in Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways: Government and the Educated Public in Russia 1801–1855* (Oxford, 1977), p. 292.

**St. George’s Day (Iur’ev den)*: in the fifteenth century, the custom arose that on or about St. George’s Day a free peasant could move, provided he had no outstanding obligations to his landlord. The association with both peasant liberty and gentry acquiescence in it is clear.

sides. Faith dwindled by the minute and sought after a sign, and not only was there no sign; there was not *one single* word of sympathy from home.¹³

Under these dispiriting circumstances, the death of Nicholas was an enormously exciting and hopeful event. Martin Malia has provided a memorable description:

... it was a day in March, 1855, during the Crimean War when Herzen learned the news that after thirty years the Tyrant had at last passed from the scene amidst the ruin of all his policies . . . the perfect embodiment of autocracy; whom he had seen only once, at the coronation in 1826, when as a boy of fourteen he had beheld the imperial hands "still red with the blood of the Decembrists," but who had dominated his whole life since the Sparrow Hills, first as a symbol, then as a reality. When Herzen learned this news, with a truly Russian broad nature (for it was not yet eleven o'clock in the morning), he summoned in his émigré friends, uncorked his best champagne, and to the London urchins who gaped at this scene through the garden gates he threw pieces of silver, calling to them to shout through the streets the tidings that meant a new and more "human" life for Russia: "Hurrah! hurrah! Impernikel is dead! Impernikel is dead!"¹⁴

Even with "Impernikel" gone, however, not much was to be expected from his old friends, and Herzen did not conceal his anger and disappointment. He soon decided, however, to expand the activities of the Free Russian Press and put out a journal; the result was the *Polar Star* (*Poliarnaia zvezda*), whose name was chosen to stress the continuity of his activity with that of the Decembrists, several of whom had published a short-lived journal of the same name. In the summer of 1855, the first number of the journal appeared, and in an article entitled "To Ours," Herzen roundly scolded his old friends: "Your silence, we frankly confess, in no way shakes our faith in the Russian people and its future; we merely doubt the moral strength and capacity of our generation."¹⁵ In this notable first number, Herzen also published Belinsky's famous "Letter to Gogol," several chapters from his memoirs, and his "Letter to Alexander II," in which he

set out what was to become his "minimum program" over the next six years: freedom of the word in Russia, abolition of corporal punishment, and—most important—the emancipation of the serfs with land.

The death of Nicholas and the liberalization measures undertaken by Alexander II proved the turning point in Herzen's career as Russia's tribune. His countrymen began to be less afraid of contact with him. The liberalized travel restrictions meant that many more Russians went abroad, and some got as far as London. Growing numbers bought, read, and even smuggled back into Russia the publications of the Free Russian Press.

To respond to the greater volume of communications reaching him from inside Russia, Herzen undertook to publish periodic anthologies which he called *Voices from Russia* (*Golosa iz Rossii*).¹⁶ These anthologies, which included a variety of points of view, give a vivid sense of the intellectual ferment in Russia that began with the new reign. Most notably, *Voices from Russia* contained several contributions by two academics who are generally considered the leading spokesmen for Russian "liberalism" in this period: Boris Chicherin and Konstantin Kavelin.

It is doubtful that the point of view articulated by these two men, which overlapped with Herzen's goals in the latter 1850s, deserves the name of liberalism. It certainly had little to do with the Manchesterian doctrines that formed the basis for early liberalism in Western Europe. Neither Chicherin nor Kavelin was—or could have been—sympathetic toward the idea of the "night watchman state." They were, in fact, moderate Westerners who hoped that the Russian state would resume the progressive role it had played before it had become separated from the *narod* by the bureaucracy—an idea that, as Terence Emmons recently noted, was widespread in the Russia of the late 1850s, "[being] shared by the conservatives, by many radicals (at least in their weaker moments), by the peasants (who on a few occasions were able to express it in quite modern terms . . .), and even by many liberals with bureaucratic experience who might have been expected to look at domestic policies in different terms."¹⁷

To get a sense of this "liberal" view, one cannot do better than

turn to one of Boris Chicherin's contributions to *Voices from Russia*. "But what should be understood by the term liberalism?" he asks rhetorically, and then gives a seven-point answer:

1. Freedom of conscience . . .
2. Freedom from serfdom . . .
3. Freedom of public opinion . . .
4. Freedom of the press . . .
5. Freedom of teaching . . .
6. Publicity of all government activities whose exposure is not harmful to the state, and especially of the budget of state revenues and expenditures . . .
7. Publicity and public conduct of legal procedures.¹⁸

It may strike us that Chicherin has produced a list of concrete reforms rather than a statement about Russian liberalism. Chicherin's statism, invariably expressed in Hegelian language, suggested that liberal reform would come from above, through the monarchy's recovery of its Petrine legacy to rationalize and humanize Russian life. But neither Chicherin nor Kavelin nor any of the other Hegelian liberals could describe a coherent liberal program; nor could they devise a way to work for the realization of their concrete plans, beyond urging the government to bring them into existence.

Once the general euphoria of the latter 1850s was over, Chicherin found himself isolated between the radical intelligentsia, whose socialism he hated and feared, and the government, which refused to adopt the progressive policies for which he had hoped. His "liberalism" gives us another slant on the constricted, unreal quality of *obshchestvo* politics, as well as on the absence in Russia of any social stratum with a material stake in liberal ideas.

Even in the 1850s, Chicherin came to believe that Herzen was an irresponsible and dangerous demagogue—despite the fact that his "liberal" demands were extremely close to Herzen's minimum program. Both Chicherin and Kavelin spoke against Herzen's socialism, and were especially antagonistic toward his view of the commune as the basis of the Russian society of the future. But Chicherin was more fervent and doctrinaire in his

hostility to socialism—as he had earlier been to Slavophilism. Kavelin's views were less firm, and he admired Herzen as a writer and a critic. In fact, the unity of Russia's two "liberal" spokesmen was a precarious affair that was not to survive the end of the decade.

In 1855 and into 1856, Herzen succeeded in getting a few copies of the *Polar Star* into Russia through his Polish contacts, and he even approached the Russian delegates to the Paris Peace Conference in 1856. But toward the middle of 1856, demand for the *Polar Star* and his other publications began to pick up, and the trend continued into 1857. By April 9, orders had been placed for three hundred copies, and Herzen was reckoning on two hundred more by May 1.¹⁹ At this point, the publications of the Free Russian Press could be obtained in several continental cities, as well as in London—and probably elsewhere, too.

It was not only the rise in sales that was encouraging to Herzen in early 1857. In mid-1856, he had received an anonymous letter, which he published in the May 1857 number of the *Polar Star*:

Your "Polar Star" [it ran] has appeared on the Petersburg horizon, and we greet it as the Bethlehem shepherds once greeted that holy star which burned over the cradle where freedom was born. If you could see with what enthusiasm it is read, its articles copied, its contents reported, your very phrases repeated, it would give you more than one sweet moment in your melancholy exile. Every noble heart among the younger generation . . . sympathizes with you.²⁰

An exhilarating letter for Herzen to receive! Here was his audience, and no mistake! Here was the future of Russia.

It was in this atmosphere of rising hope and excitement that the *Bell* was born in the spring of 1857. The idea apparently came from Nikolai Ogarëv, Herzen's old and close friend, who had joined him in London as a collaborator a year before. Herzen seized upon it with alacrity. The *Polar Star*, they thought at the time, should continue as the vehicle for major theoretical works, the republication of out-of-print or suppressed classics, and the like; the *Bell* would be a kind of supplement, whose material should be "lighter," more newsy, and which could respond with

greater rapidity and flexibility to the drama beginning to unfold in Russia. But soon the *Bell* became the major vehicle, while the *Polar Star* simply petered out.

The *Bell* was an immense success. Between 1857 and 1862, its circulation rose to something over twenty-five hundred copies per issue;²¹ the upward curve of the *Bell*'s circulation figures coincided precisely with the springtime of the post-Nicholaevan period, with the general intellectual ferment that carried through the Emancipation.

On occasion the *Bell* featured theoretical articles by Herzen on Russian socialism; Ogarëv contributed both prose and poetry. In a section called "Is It True?" (*Pravda li?*), rumors and sometimes established facts of scandalous behavior by the government or individual landowners were printed. A great deal of the material was from anonymous individuals or groups within Russia, people who have generally been referred to as Herzen's "correspondents." Sometimes these correspondents had a personal message; sometimes they wished to comment on an issue of the day, most frequently the peasant question. Sometimes the correspondents were to Herzen's right; sometimes he was criticized from the Left. According to Herzen's stated policy, only two kinds of correspondence were not printed: what he judged to be material from cranks or of no general interest, and literature that was frankly government-inspired or reflected the official government point of view.

The importance of Herzen's correspondents suggests the degree to which Herzen conceived the *Bell* not merely as his organ—or his and Ogarëv's—but as an enterprise in which all the voices of the new era were involved. His countrymen were not merely to listen to the *Bell*, said Herzen, they were to ring it themselves. He wanted to create a chorus, not merely a single note.²² And in this he largely succeeded.

At the outset, Herzen made a momentous decision with respect to what he hoped the *Bell* would accomplish. Despite the publication of a good deal of material pertaining both directly and indirectly to peasant socialism, he intended to have as great an effect as possible on the Emancipation drama. The decision

was momentous because it led the *Bell*—with many a twist and turn, to be sure—away from the more systematic radicalism that Herzen had professed in the early 1850s and led him to address Alexander II directly—and not merely in apocalyptic and accusatory tones. He was willing to plead, cajole—and, on occasion, to flatter and congratulate. The most famous such incident occurred on February 15, 1858, after the publication of the so-called “Rescript to Nazimov” had publicly committed the government to some kind of major reform. In the current number of the *Bell*, Herzen published a congratulatory “Open Letter” to the Emperor that began with the words “Thou hast conquered, O Galilean.” This exultant apostrophe was eagerly seized upon by Herzen’s young radical opponents, to whom it flagrantly exhibited his moderation, credulity, and reliance on a melodramatic and dated rhetoric. Taken out of context, the words seemed particularly ridiculous, and the episode was damaging.

The question to what extent the *Bell*’s concentration on the minimum program (freedom of the word, abolition of corporal punishment, and Emancipation of the serfs with land) was merely a tactic and to what extent Herzen actually became “more conservative” is one over which historians have been battling from that day to this. It is of course true that if one puts forward one’s minimum program over a period of years—successfully—what began as a tactic may become something more—if not quite a conviction. Nor should Herzen’s view of the historical evolution of the Russian monarchy be left out of account: he saw it as an ambiguously progressive force in Russian life between Peter the Great and shortly after 1815. Only under Nicholas had the dynasty become wholly retrograde. So it was not so difficult for Herzen to believe on occasion that the monarchy might again take up the burdens and responsibilities it had abdicated under Nicholas. And Herzen also continued to entertain hopes of the gentry—or at least a progressive portion of it. Should the monarchy prove equal to the task of reforming itself, the collaboration of a certain portion of the gentry would be essential. Or, if the need should be for a social and political struggle against the crown, the “progressive” gentry might be an

indispensable force for change. During the latter 1850s, although Herzen periodically informed his readers that the only alternative to a generous emancipation was a bloody peasant uprising, one senses that he gradually lost whatever taste he might once have had for such a holocaust. He was too cultivated, too attached to so much of Russian life and culture, to dream the passionate dreams of apocalypse that some of the younger generation were soon to express.

Herzen's only firm conviction was that radical change in Russia had to come about, in some sense, *through* the people; it could not be done exclusively *for* or *to* them. As he wrote in an essay of the early 1860s:

Only the man who, when summoned to action, understands the life of the people, while not losing what science has given him; only the man who voices its aspirations, and founds on the realisation of them his participation in the common cause of the people of the soil, will be the bridegroom that is to come. . . .

Who will be the destined man?

Will it be an emperor who, renouncing the Petrine tradition [that is, antinational revolution from above], combines in himself Tsar and Stenka Razin? Will it be a new Pestel? Or another Yemelyan Pugachëv, Cossack, Tsar and schismatic? Or will it be a prophet and a peasant, like Antony Bezdinsky?*

It is hard to tell: these are *des détails*, as the French say. Whoever it may be, it is our task to go to meet him with bread and salt.²³

Initially, Herzen's minimum program was as successful as he could have hoped. Now unmasking concrete abuses, now publishing "radical" but constructive proposals as to how the emancipation should proceed, now opening his pages to a wide variety of opinions and information from inside the country seems to have corresponded exactly to the needs of the moment. The *Bell* was read not only by young radicals like Nikolai Dobroliubov, but by far broader strata of the population. Herzen once remarked that he wanted to be read "in the Winter Palace." His ambition

*Herzen refers to Anton Petrov, the "leader" of the only considerable peasant disturbance that followed the Emancipation, in the village of Bezdna. Petrov's status as a "prophet" is open to some doubt.

X was gratified, and indeed the contents of the *Bell* were as well known to some members of the upper bureaucracy as they were to radical students. A. M. Unkovsky, a gentry "liberal" from Tver' province, went so far as to say that in the city of Tver', "Herzen's influence was so powerful that there was not a house [in gentry and bureaucratic spheres] in which the *Bell* was not to be found."²⁴ This is probably an exaggeration, and yet it suggests the *Bell*'s interest for cultivated people of different political persuasions. After all, it contained an extraordinary amount of interesting *information*. With a press as constrained as Russia's was, portions of the *Bell* could be read as a kind of gossip sheet. And in reformist Tver', an amorphous kind of progressivism was increasingly chic. Having a copy of the *Bell* around the house lent most establishments a certain cachet. As far as the students were concerned, the progressive publicist N. A. Mel'gunov wrote to Herzen at the beginning of 1858: "our youth prays to you, keeps portraits of you and even refuses to abuse those whom you, evidently by design, do not abuse."²⁵

By the end of 1858, Herzen had done far more than woo his old Westerner friends back into the fold: he had created an all-Russian audience for the *Bell*. And getting the *Bell* and other contraband literature into the country was becoming much less difficult. This was in part due to the considerable increase in the number of Russians traveling abroad—and to the interest that many of them had in Herzen's message. In December 1857, the Third Section compiled a list of the outlets in Western Europe where one could buy the *Bell* and other contraband literature. Cities in which there were one or more booksellers stocking such literature now included London, Vienna, Hamburg, Berlin, Brussels, Breslau, Poznan, Leipzig, and Paris; an outlet soon appeared in Dresden. Nor was Herzen entirely dependent any longer on returning travelers. Certain foreign booksellers smuggled in publications of the Free Russian Press with false covers pasted on, along with shipments of licit reading matter; others inserted caches of books in shipments of clothes or hats; still others merely resorted to the time-honored practice of bribing the authorities. (Nor did the *Bell* come in only through Western Europe. There

was a considerable illegal traffic in more ordinary forms of contraband from Athens and Constantinople to Odessa; from Chinese cities into Irkutsk.) Herzen even sent copies of his journal through the regular mail to highly placed personages in Russia, who presumably would not be damaged if it were discovered that the *Bell* had arrived with the morning post.²⁶

Ordinarily, one calculates that each copy of a subscribed periodical is read by one or two or three people. The *Bell*, however, was different. A good many copies found their way into networks of students in universities and other higher institutions, and even gymnasia. If a student-run library stocked the *Bell*, it seems plausible that scores of students might read all or part of a single copy. Among students and elsewhere in society, copies were frequently passed from hand to hand, and on numerous occasions individual articles and even entire issues were reproduced and distributed, usually by students—even in provincial cities like Voronezh. Thus, although no precise figure can be given as to how many people “read” the *Bell*, it was obviously far more than the several thousand copies being printed; indeed, one must assume that at least in the major cities of the empire, anyone who was willing to make a serious effort could get hold of a copy of the *Bell* without much difficulty.

The Russian government worked away at countering what was regarded in most quarters as Herzen’s sinister influence. They attempted to put pressure on foreign governments, where there was a chance that such pressure might be effective. They sent spies abroad; they adopted such measures of domestic vigilance as they were capable of at home. Yet the government effort was not only ineffective and inefficient but also a bit halfhearted. A good many highly placed people read the *Bell*, either as a scandal sheet or because they found its unmasking of abuses useful. Iakov Rostovtsev, the chief bureaucratic emancipator, took out a subscription for the Editorial Commission, the central bureaucratic agency in the drafting of the Emancipation legislation.²⁷

To Alexander and the upper bureaucracy, the ideological position of the *Bell* was noxious, but the journal had its uses, especially to those working on the Emancipation reform who wanted

to deal as generously with the peasantry as seemed politically and economically possible. No doubt some effort was made to keep the *Bell* out of the country. But had the government been more determined, a great deal more could have been done, in particular to keep it from circulating widely within Russia's borders.

Toward the end of the 1850s, Herzen's house in London became a center of Russian life abroad. The stream of Russian and Polish radicals and other refugees from the continent increased, and to it was added a motley group of Russian travelers, not all of whose motives were political or even in any way serious. One of his collaborators on the *Bell*, V. I. Kel'siev,* has left us an exceptionally vivid picture of the more social dimension of Herzen's activity:

The visitor to London generally informed Trübner [Herzen's London publisher] of his desire to have the honor of making Herzen's acquaintance. Trübner would give him the address and offer to write a note. In answer to this note, Herzen would arrange a meeting, either at his place or at that of the visitor, if the latter for some reason did not want to be seen in Herzen's house. Such cases were very frequent. . . . People did not use their real names in Herzen's house, or used them very rarely. Whoever did not wish to conceal his visits gave his own name; with those who were uncertain or asked that their names not be given out, we either changed them (which, incidentally, happened rarely) or dealt with indiscreet questions by saying that we didn't remember, didn't know, it was a difficult name, etc. And in fact it was hard to remember all those who came to worship, there were so many of them. They flashed by, one after the other; they came in, trembling with reverence, heard every word of Herzen and engraved it in their memory; they gave him information, either orally or in the form of prepared notes; they expressed their sympathy to him and the sympathy of their acquaintances; they thanked him for the benefits conferred upon Russia by his unmasking and for the fear which the *Bell* inspired in everything dishonest and unclean; then they took their leave and disappeared. Whom did I not see at Herzen's in my time! There were governors, generals, merchants, litterateurs, ladies, old men and old women—there were students. A

*The passage is taken from what is known as Kel'siev's "Confession," made after he returned to Russia and threw himself on the mercy of the government. The description seems accurate enough, however.

whole panorama of some kind passed before one's eyes, really a cascade—and all this without taking into account those whom he saw *tête à tête*. Many a time, standing at the fireplace in his study in Fulham, I laughed inside to hear some retired captain, who had travelled to London expressly to see Herzen from some backwater like Simbirsk or Vologda, declare his sympathy, explain that he was not a reactionary.²⁸

As Herzen succinctly put it in his memoirs, “we were in fashion.”

How great was the *Bell's* influence on Russian society in the late 1850s? We do know that despite some interest by Rostovtsev and other bureaucrats at the highest level of government, the *Bell's* direct impact on the creation of the Emancipation Statute was negligible. Its indirect influence, one might argue, was somewhat greater, but in view of the small number of men actually involved in drawing up the statute, and their *relative* insulation from public opinion, it would be a mistake to ascribe either much praise or blame to Herzen for the final shape of the settlement.

His influence on broad strata of public opinion was obviously much greater, but to say with any precision *how* great involves one in the most basic questions of the relationship between ideas and other, less clearly defined social forces in a developing historical situation. Herzen, a man of great energy and publicistic talent, was ready from his base in London to channel the aspirations and express the hopes of an emerging, shapeless, optimistic body of public opinion in Russia, eager for change and forward movement after the stagnation of Nicholas's reign and Russia's defeat in the Crimean War. His failure to find an audience in Russia before 1856 shows that his later success depended on the times, on the public mood, on the initial actions of Alexander II. But Herzen capitalized brilliantly on his opportunity. His mix of ideological socialism, veneration of the peasant, sardonic unmasking of individual and bureaucratic abuses could not—at least initially—have been better designed to express the developing social mood. His irony, flamboyance, and righteous indignation had a special appeal for Russian youth, desirous of change, disposed to be angry with its elders and to regard itself as the hope of the future—yet without much sense of practical politics

or the possibility of developing a coherent, practical program of reform. The number of young radicals who kept pictures of Herzen, their hero, suggests that his image and personality, as well as his ideas, were important to them. As Russian youth became more experienced in the ways of radicalism, less hopeful, more cut off and isolated from the surrounding society, however, the personality of Herzen became less attractive to those whose hatred of the established order was greater, and in some cases whose origins were humbler.

Of course, there were many vague progressives in the late 1850s, students and nonstudents alike, whose "awakening" was a kind of springtime that passed, a sowing of wild oats. They had their brief fling at radicalism or even revolution, "looked into" the *Bell*—and were absorbed, one way or another, by the changing society around them. Many older men and women were attracted by the social ferment, applauded the Emancipation, but became politically apathetic, absorbed by family and career in the 1860s. Many—more than one would like to believe—undoubtedly found the primitive, chauvinistic bromides of reactionary journalists like Mikhail Katkov a satisfactory substitute for Herzen's brilliant rhetoric.

"Die, if necessary," wrote Herzen in one of his passionate appeals to the younger generation, "for the preservation of the *equal right of every peasant to land*—die for the communal principle."²⁹ Only a few would take such advice at face value and act upon it when public opinion was less well disposed, and ironically enough they were just the ones for whom the persona of Herzen, with his irony, literary ambition, and long cultural baggage train, was soon to become suspect. For despite Herzen's theoretical socialism, which was sometimes to be seen in the pages of the *Bell*, the whole thrust of his minimum program was to draw him close to the moderate reformism of liberal professors like Konstantin Kavelin or, for that matter, Ivan Turgenev. Boris Chicherin criticized Herzen's socialism in *Voices from Russia*, but, for the most part, moderate public opinion had little difficulty in "accepting" Herzen's minimum program and the means through which he hoped to realize it.

In 1859 Herzen faced for the first time what one may roughly call a challenge from the Left. At the root of this challenge lay the fact that the inchoate political optimism that characterized the beginning of the new era was developing some rudimentary structure, and Herzen's desire to be realistic and effective had pulled him toward the center.

By that year, nuclei of a much more intransigent attitude toward the old order in Russia already existed both on university campuses and particularly in association with the St. Petersburg periodical the *Contemporary* (*Sovremennik*), of whom the most important editor was Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky. Most of the group around the *Contemporary* had been deeply influenced by Herzen. But their Herzen was the radical Westerner of the 1840s and the author of the incendiary books and pamphlets of the early 1850s—not the pragmatic and canny editor of the *Bell* who wanted to be read in the Winter Palace.

The *Contemporary* was one of Russia's most venerable journals. Founded by the poet Aleksandr Pushkin and his friend P. A. Pletnëv in 1836, it had come under Pletnëv's sole control when Pushkin was killed in a duel a year later, and it had remained his journal until 1846. Pletnëv, a man of purely literary interests, cared nothing for the social and political debates of the 1840s, and during his tenure the *Contemporary* came to be regarded as an honorable anachronism, a relic of the golden age of Russian poetry that had passed. In 1847 the journal was bought by the critic I. I. Panaev and the poet N. A. Nekrasov. Under their leadership it published several of Vissarion Belinsky's final and most engagé articles, and even during the worst of the post-1848 reaction it maintained a cautiously Western and progressive orientation. By 1855 its circulation had grown to about three thousand,³⁰ a considerable figure for the time. And in that same year Chernyshevsky began his close association with the *Contemporary*, an association as important to the history of Russian radicalism as that of Herzen with the *Bell*.

Chernyshevsky came from a long line of village priests of the central Volga region. He was born in 1828 in the provincial city of Saratov, where his father was the priest of a considerable

parish and a person of consequence in the ecclesiastical affairs of the region. Chernyshevsky's father, Gavriil, according to William F. Woehrlin, a recent biographer,³¹ was far from the stereotypical narrow-minded provincial ecclesiastic so often portrayed in the pages of nineteenth-century Russian novels. He was a man of considerable education and a large fund of "Christian kindness and humanity." Family life was warm and pleasant, and until young Chernyshevsky arrived at the University of St. Petersburg he showed little of the rebelliousness that was dramatically to characterize the remainder of his life. He was shy and provincial, an omnivorous but disorganized reader, solitary and still committed to the Christian views of his family.

Between 1846 and 1851, Chernyshevsky's political and religious views underwent a total change. He came to know several members of the Petrashevsky Circle, the only radical grouping of any importance at the time, and several other critics of the government. He read François Fourier and Ludwig Feuerbach, observed the revolutions of 1848 with attention. By 1850 he considered himself a philosophical materialist and "remarked that he valued Herzen above all other Russians and that there was nothing he would not do for him."³²

After several years as a teacher, most of the time in Saratov, Chernyshevsky began the career as a journalist that was to end only with his arrest in 1862. He might have continued his teaching—who can say for how long—had it not been for the rejection, in 1855, of his master's dissertation, "On the Aesthetic Relations Between Art and Reality," in which he coolly denied the importance of technical aesthetic questions and advocated an art that would pose vital moral and political questions, questions that in Russia could be posed in no other way. As Venturi has remarked, Chernyshevsky was consciously engaged in recovering and developing the tradition of engaged criticism that Belinsky had begun.

At first, Chernyshevsky divided his critical contributions between the *Contemporary* and the *Annals of the Fatherland* (*Otechestvennye zapiski*), but he soon committed himself to the former, where he became, by dint of hard work, reliability, and a certain amount of flattery, completely indispensable to Ne-

krasov. In 1855, with an academic career seemingly ruled out, Chernyshevsky took full charge of the literary and later the socio-political sections of the *Contemporary*.

Almost from the beginning, Chernyshevsky's call for a socially engaged art met opposition from the variously talented group of writers who were the literary mainstays of the *Contemporary*—most notably from Leo Tolstoy and Ivan Turgenev. The quarrel has been frequently treated in historical literature;³³ what is important for us is that the dispute between writers like Turgenev and Chernyshevsky has its similarities with the more political conflict between Chernyshevsky and Herzen, which came to a head in 1859.

Basically, there were two things about Chernyshevsky to which Turgenev and the others objected. One was his relative indifference to literary craft and to the autonomous value of art. The other was the more nebulous but extremely important question of his personality, manner, and *style*. These were matters that were also at stake in the disputes between Herzen and the followers of Chernyshevsky in the 1860s.

Any reader who follows the trail of quarrels between Chernyshevsky and his opponents is likely to be struck by the unusual vehemence of the latter—especially the more aristocratic ones. Their hostility was not mere snobbism, although there was plenty of that. (Tolstoy, whose reaction to Chernyshevsky was particularly extreme, referred to him as “this gentleman who smells of bugs,” and there is plenty of other evidence that Chernyshevsky's plebeian origins were held against him. How dare this bedraggled creature from the seminary bandy words with a Tolstoy—or a Turgenev!) Chernyshevsky offended against a whole nexus of values, many of which were as dear to a “radical” like Herzen as to an apolitical gentry novelist (as he then was) like Tolstoy. Many of these values related to character traits that were specifically male and specifically aristocratic. Chernyshevsky had little sense of *culture*—in the sense that a cultivated man of the world ought to be familiar with certain places, books, and situations, ought to have ritualized his behavior in certain ways. He was concerned with what interested him. He was narrow and single-

mined. He did not care about good manners. He could be a bore.

In a society that still valued masculinity and animal vitality, Chernyshevsky was shy and diffident and even slightly effeminate. He was made ridiculous by his wife, a vain and shallow woman for whom he entertained a slavish and hopeless passion. There was nothing martial about him, nor was there much evidence of that passionate love of physical nature so obvious in Turgenev, for instance.

In a more intellectual vein, his ethics were utilitarian. He believed in what he called "rational egoism"—that proper ethical conduct consisted in interpreting the pleasure-pain calculus to bring the greatest benefit to society as a whole.

Chernyshevsky was not an ignoble person. On the contrary. Those who knew him best all attested to his tender heart, his benevolence, his selflessness. His conduct throughout his journalistic and "political" career certainly demonstrates that he did not lack courage. But it was the courage of the clerk, not of the warrior. Compared with Herzen, he seems pure—but also bloodless and somewhat arid. When his enemies accused him of stinking of the seminary, they were not altogether mistaken: he possessed that subtle combination of arrogance and humility so often characteristic of priests, and not only in Russia; he is a figure out of Russian religious history, despite himself. Thinking back on the 1850s at the end of his life in exile, he wrote that "My memories of Turgenev and the others are incapable of arousing in me any other feeling than a longing to sleep. . . . These people had no interest for me. . . . I was a man crushed by work. They lived the usual life of the educated classes, and I had no inclination for that."³⁴ The smug dismissiveness helps explain why so much of *obshchestvo* disliked Chernyshevsky in so visceral a way.

Chernyshevsky's conversion to materialism was an intellectual one. From the standpoint of character, ethical *behavior*, and tone, he underwent no sharp break with his early spiritual and intellectual formation. What Nicolas Berdyaev, a great student of the Russian intelligentsia, wrote of nihilism in general is specifically relevant to Chernyshevsky:

[Nihilism] grew up on the spiritual soil of Orthodoxy; it could appear only in a soul which was cast in an Orthodox mould. It is Orthodox asceticism turned inside out, and asceticism without Grace. At the base of Russian nihilism, when grasped in its purity and depth, lies the Orthodox rejection of the world, its sense of the truth that "the whole world lieth in wickedness," the acknowledgement of the sinfulness of all riches and luxury, of all creative profusion in art and in thought. Like Orthodox asceticism, nihilism was an individualist movement, but it was also directed against the fulness and richness of life. Nihilism considers as sinful luxury not only art, metaphysics and spiritual values, but religion also. All its strength must be devoted to the emancipation of earthly man, the emancipation of laboring people from their excessive suffering, to establishing conditions of a happy life, to the destruction of superstition and prejudice, conventional standards and lofty ideas, which enslave man and hinder his happiness. That is the one thing needful, all else is of the Devil.³⁵

Small wonder that to Tolstoy, who at that time embodied "creative profusion in art" and "the fulness and richness of life," Chernyshevsky appeared a canting priest, an ill-smelling Savonarola.

His asceticism seemed to convey not only a programmatic joylessness but the desire to deprive others of pleasure, to narrow life, to make it gray. Turgenev found his dissertation, subsequently published in the *Contemporary*, to be "disgusting carrion."³⁶ Although Turgenev's hostility was less violent and total than that of Tolstoy (on occasion he was capable of finding Chernyshevsky "useful"), he never really modified his underlying dislike, and he finally broke with the *Contemporary* altogether in 1860. Although Chernyshevsky preached the equality of the sexes and in some ways lived his doctrine with remarkable consistency and character, love and sex were in practice a humiliation and a torment to him. He did not enjoy good wine, sensual, unprogrammatic conversation. He was a Russian Roundhead, and his enemies were Cavaliers, even if they were in favor of a generous emancipation settlement or thought that all virtue resided in the Russian people.*

*Of the generation of the 1840s, only the plebeian Belinsky was at all similar to Chernyshevsky in stylistic effect, but he was singularly lacking in Chernyshevsky's dryness. But then there was no "young generation" to be concerned with such things.

But a generation was growing up in Russia that would pass a very different judgment on Chernyshevsky and the values and style he embodied. They would rightly see in his manner a far more vigorous repudiation of the past than it was in Herzen's power to make. They would condemn the useless cultural baggage that Herzen—like other "older people"—carried around on his back like a turtle's shell. And they would fervently embrace the sexual equality for which Chernyshevsky and others so firmly stood. What to the young Tolstoy was joyously male behavior, they would find repulsively exploitative. Turgenev with his hunting, Tolstoy with his wenching, Herzen with his fine conversation, his fancy phrases in five languages—all of them embodied the values of *obshchestvo*, however intellectually critical they may have been. Chernyshevsky not only repudiated those values, he gave the younger generation a living model of something else, something to oppose to those who became known, after Turgenev's novel, as "the fathers."

Turgenev himself understood the new mentality very well; his feelings, like Herzen's, were far more ambiguous than those of Tolstoy. Turgenev captured a good deal of the "younger generation" in a famous speech that he gave Bazarov, the hero of *Fathers and Children*:

But then we realized that to talk, to talk everlastingly about our ulcers is not worth the labor, that it only leads to platitudes and doctrinairism; we also saw that our wise men, the so-called advanced people and accusers, were good for nothing, that we were occupying our minds with rubbish; we were talking about art, about unconscious creation, about parliamentarianism, about the bar, and the devil knows what else, when it was really a question of daily bread, when we were being smothered by the crudest of superstitions . . . when the very freedom the government was making so much fuss about would hardly be of any use to us, because our peasant is glad to rob himself just in order to get drunk in the tavern.³⁷

Chernyshevsky recognized his enormous intellectual debt to the Westerners of the 1840s, to Herzen and Belinsky in particular. But he did not love them as Herzen did, nor did he identify with

them. Herzen took a kind of pleasure in running his fingers over those intellectual sores; there is a perceptible morbid rapture in his discussion of the "superfluous men" and their life under Nicholas.

But to Nikolai Dobroliubov and others of Chernyshevsky's younger followers, what had come by 1859 to seem most striking about the older gentry "rebels" was their self-pity, their uselessness, their incapacity for day-to-day work. The mood of the time made this generation gap inevitable. The gulf in consciousness between the pre- and post-Crimean period had become—in less than five years—enormous, virtually unbridgeable. Herzen told the younger radicals that they didn't know what it was like to live under Nicholas. Of course they didn't! But who could care about that in 1859?

The new era had something of the same effect on the fortunes of the *Contemporary* as it had on those of the *Bell*. Between 1856 and 1860, the *Contemporary*'s subscribers increased from three thousand to sixty-five hundred³⁸—and this despite the defection of the literary stars who had made the journal what it was. Nekrasov's faith in Chernyshevsky was amply vindicated by the developing social mood of the latter 1850s.

The withdrawal of the Turgenevs and the Tolstoys gave Chernyshevsky the opportunity to staff the journal with collaborators of his own choosing. The most important of these was Nikolai Dobroliubov, a young man from a background similar to Chernyshevsky's but far less happy and tranquil. Dobroliubov shared Chernyshevsky's general outlook—they were intellectually at one to an extraordinary degree—but his temperament was quite different.* Chernyshevsky's behavior toward his "liberal" enemies was, on the whole, far from provocative—despite their frequent and venomous accusations and sallies. (He made, in fact, a notable effort to avoid a total break with Turgenev, and for a considerable time he succeeded.) Dobroliubov's hatred of the old

*See Alfred Kuhn's perceptive remarks about how similar Dobroliubov felt himself to be to the lazy, procrastinating, indecisive Oblomov-type he so violently attacked, in "Dobroliubov's Critique of Oblomov: Polemics and Psychology," *Slavic Review* 30:1 (March 1971), pp. 93–109. There is also an excellent biographical sketch in E. Lampert, *Sons Against Fathers* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 226–71.

order was, if not more thoroughgoing than Chernyshevsky's, sharper and more visceral; he was a very unhappy young man, consumed at times both with self-hatred and with loathing of the world around him, and delighted to throw down the gauntlet to those he disagreed with. Dobroliubov's challenge to his enemies was as explicit as it could possibly be.

Dobroliubov's connection with the *Contemporary* lasted just five years. In 1856, while still a student at the Pedagogical Institute in St. Petersburg, he became an occasional contributor. After his graduation in 1857, he became a regular member of the staff; soon he virtually took over the criticism section, which allowed Chernyshevsky to devote himself primarily to social and political matters. In 1859, Dobroliubov founded a satirical supplement to the *Contemporary* entitled the *Whistle* (*Svistok*), which contained the most biting and barbed criticism of gentry Russia and particularly of "liberal" Russia that had ever appeared in public print. The *Whistle* drew an immediate response from militant university students. One wrote to Dobroliubov that "after reading your fine *Whistle*, I have the desire to heckle the university wisemen, the Olympian professors, together with the newly born university 'police,' i.e., the rector, inspector and subinspector."³⁹

It was Dobroliubov who finally provoked Turgenev into a total break with the *Contemporary* in 1860, with a harsh review of the latter's *On the Eve*, entitled "Will the Real Day Ever Come?" Exhausted by a long battle with "scrofula" (tuberculosis of the lymph glands), Dobroliubov died in November 1861. His death was an enormous blow to Chernyshevsky, who had not only agreed with his opinions and sponsored his career but loved him with a kind of tenderness that only a handful of those who were close to him realized he possessed.

In 1857 and 1858 the political line of the *Contemporary* was almost identical with that of the *Bell*. Both hailed Russia's intellectual awakening; both spoke for a coalition of all progressive forces in the country. Chernyshevsky hailed the public commitment to emancipation in terms almost as rhapsodic as those of Herzen. Like Herzen, he defended the village com-

mune as a socialist nucleus for the future; like Herzen, he pressed for an emancipation *with land*. But in Chernyshevsky's defense of the commune, the Slavophile feeling was far less pronounced than with Herzen. There was no talk of the Russians being "young" and the West "old"; there was no sense of Russia's mission to "save" the West. Instead of Herzen's glittering (but sometimes rather abstract) paeans to the Russian village, Chernyshevsky "looked upon the *obshchina* as an elementary and primitive form of cooperative, which could develop into a more modern variety and thence into an agricultural collective."⁴⁰ But like Herzen and the later Populists, Chernyshevsky hoped that the survival of the commune could enable Russia to move directly to socialism, or at least enormously reduce the length and misery of the intermediate stages of development. "History," he said, "like a grandmother, is very fond of its grandchildren."⁴¹

Chernyshevsky was concentrating on "practical" and minimal goals, much as Herzen did. He worked at making a case for the advantages of free labor to gentry Russia. He devoted much time and space to trying to persuade the makers of the Emancipation that the peasants should not have to pay too dearly for the land they would receive—although his personal conviction was that the peasants should receive all the land they presently farmed and pay nothing for it. Quite as much as Herzen, he was engaging in the politics of the possible.

But by mid-1859, Chernyshevsky had grown more pessimistic about the possibility of an emancipation that would be, from the peasant's point of view, even tolerable. A progressive coalition was no longer useful, he thought; indeed, it was dangerous and harmful. What was needed was to create a real radical constituency for the future, since the peasants would certainly not be satisfied with what they would receive, and major disorders—even revolution—became a real possibility. Herzen, far away in London, did not seem to understand the situation and continued with the old politics of cajoling, praising, and threatening the government by turns, perhaps because he had known Nikolai Miliutin and other reformers, and felt that they were fundamen-

tally on the right side. If there had ever been any point in being read in the Winter Palace—Chernyshevsky might have thought to himself—there certainly was none now.

Characteristically, it was Dobroliubov and not Chernyshevsky himself who provoked the breach. Back in 1856 and 1857, it will be remembered, Dobroliubov had idolized Herzen in a way that Chernyshevsky had long since ceased to do. But in the course of 1858, Dobroliubov's attitude seems to have changed. There is some evidence to suggest that by the middle of that year he was beginning to be bothered by Herzen's conciliatory attitude toward Alexander. Furthermore, he had a personal bone to pick with Herzen, as the latter had not printed Dobroliubov's second lengthy denunciation of disciplinary abuses at the Petersburg Pedagogical Institute. In the summer and fall of 1858, Herzen received a number of letters from Russia criticizing him for entertaining such high hopes of Alexander.⁴²

What actually brought about the quarrel, however, were several pieces that Dobroliubov published early in 1859. In essence, he castigated the "liberals" for their illusions and denounced the kind of accusatory literature that the *Bell* had been printing for several years. Denunciations of specific abuses were of no use, he said, and were even harmful, insofar as they helped a rotten system to maintain its equilibrium for a while longer.

Herzen's ire was thoroughly aroused. On June 1, he published a reply in the *Bell* entitled "Very Dangerous!!!" in which he defended the efforts of moderate reformers and the usefulness of the broad coalition of progressive forces against which both Dobroliubov and Chernyshevsky were now directing their attacks. Herzen was especially stung by the notion that the "superfluous men" of his own generation were now of no further use—a charge he was to hear with increasing frequency over the next ten years—and that the torch was passing to a new and more vital generation. Herzen accused the *Contemporary* of playing the reactionaries' game by trying to shatter the coalition that had been the driving force for reform.

Intellectual differences were then exacerbated by personal ones. Nekrasov was concerned for his journal and for the

consequences of a total rupture with the *Bell*. He persuaded a reluctant Chernyshevsky to travel to London in late June to attempt to heal the breach. The one meeting between Herzen and Chernyshevsky was not a success, and although no consecutive and really credible description of their encounter has survived, the difficulties seem to have been at least as much a matter of style as of policy.⁴³ Herzen, it seems, behaved with an Olympian hauteur, to which Chernyshevsky responded characteristically by commenting on how tedious Herzen was. "To remain longer would only have been boring," he wrote to Dobroliubov. "It is true that the journey was not useless, but if I had known how boring it would be, I should not have come. . . . My God, I had to say a few things. . . . He is a Kavelin* squared, that is all."⁴⁴ And to the editor of the *Russian Word*, Chernyshevsky observed ironically that Herzen still believed he was breaking lances with Khomiakov in the fine drawing rooms of Moscow.

Relations between London and St. Petersburg changed very little until mid-1861, when Herzen quickly came to realize the full inadequacy of the final Emancipation settlement, and the *Bell* gave vent to the full-throated opposition to the settlement for which Chernyshevsky had been hoping. During this period neither Herzen nor Chernyshevsky wished for a noisy and irreparable breach. Chernyshevsky certainly detested Herzen (especially for having attacked Dobroliubov) and probably felt that he had been deliberately humiliated by him. He probably had been. But the impulse at the *Contemporary* to expose Herzen was counterbalanced by the sporadic desire to radicalize him, to win him over. Herzen, after all, could not quite be equated with the detestable "liberals," and the tactical significance of the *Bell* could not be ignored.

In March 1860, the *Bell* published an anonymous "Letter from the Provinces"; the author's identity is uncertain, but the point of view was that of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov. The "Let-

*Konstantin Kavelin, in Chernyshevsky's view, was one of those credulous liberal professors who expected the dynasty (or "the state") to bestow liberty on Russia more or less painlessly, without violence or struggle.

ter" contained a passionate plea that Herzen not be taken in by liberal fantasies.

You will soon see [the letter ran] that Alexander II will show his teeth, as Nicholas I did. Don't be taken in by gossip about our progress. We are exactly where we were before. . . . Don't be taken in by hope and don't take in others. . . . No, our position is horrible, unbearable, and only the peasants' axes can save us. Nothing apart from those axes is of any use. You have already been told this, it seems, and it is extraordinarily true. There is no other means of salvation. You did everything possible to help a peaceful solution of the problem, but now you are changing your tune. Let your "bell" sound not to prayer but for the charge. Summon Russia to arms.⁴⁵

The "Letter" was signed "one of your friends."

Herzen struck the same note of passionate but friendly disagreement:

We differ from you [he replied] *not in ideas* but in methods; *not in principles* but in ways of acting. You are only *the extreme* expression of *our* own position. We understand your one-sidedness. It is close to our hearts. Our indignation is as young as yours, and our love for the Russian people is as alive now as it was in the years of our youth. But we will not call for the axe, for that oppressive *ultima ratio*, *so long as there remains one reasonable hope of a solution without the axe.*⁴⁶

The emphasis on youth and age is worth noting. For when Herzen returned to the offensive that fall in an article entitled "The Superfluous Men and the Bilious Ones," it was again the curt dismissal of his contemporaries (and himself) that angered him most. The ingratitude! The lack of a feeling for old struggles or even an interest in them! Herzen predicted that the "bilious" generation would quickly give place to something healthier, better rounded, more life-affirming. The "superfluous men" had admittedly been mutilated by Russian reality, but the younger generation was equally, if differently, malformed. How many older radicals have felt similar sentiments when confronted by their intellectual heirs and successors!

When Soviet historians deal with the quarrel between Chernyshevsky-Dobroliubov and Herzen in 1859-60, the principal point is to contrast Herzen's "vacillations" and "liberal illusions" with the revolutionary militancy of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov. In so doing, they are celebrating the emergence of an unflinchingly revolutionary viewpoint among the intelligentsia, a development they (no doubt accurately) consider an important stage along the way to 1917. For historians of a different perspective, the significance of the episode dwindles and becomes more a matter of tone, style, and feeling. Still, there is no question that by 1859 Chernyshevsky had come to feel that Herzen was far too optimistic about what might be expected from the Emperor and too close to the spineless and trivial liberals (Chicherin and Kavelin), whose pathetic belief in the monarchy Chernyshevsky felt needed to be exposed in order for a resolute, realistic radical position to become a reality. The siren song of the moderates, hoping for a generous and peaceful solution to the peasant question "from above," was confusing and disorienting to progressive opinion and had to be exposed.

But the quarrel between Herzen and Chernyshevsky is most important in the history of Russian radicalism because it is premonitory, because it heralded the appearance of a new, militant, and irreconcilable radical spirit. But its importance at the time should not be exaggerated. To read some accounts, one might imagine that public opinion was occupied with little else than sorting itself out into two neat "camps": one genuinely radical and plebeian, grouped about the *Contemporary*, the other made up of gentry "liberals," waverers, and a host of futile and well-intentioned people who continued to believe, against all evidence, in the goodwill of the Emperor and in the possibility of serious reform from above. But in going through the memoir literature on the period, one does not receive this impression. The disagreements between the *Contemporary* and the *Bell* were of immediate importance to only a small number of people, most of whom were closely connected with one side or the other. Most politically aware contemporaries continued to think of Herzen and Chernyshevsky as allies—as, to a degree, they did

themselves. The notion that the amorphously progressive coalition suffered a fatal blow in 1859 is largely the work of historians who view the quarrel in terms of later developments within Russian radicalism.

In 1861 and 1862, progressive Russians were occupied with other things than journalists' tactical disputes. The Emancipation Edict was finally promulgated, and after a brief moment of euphoria, Herzen joined Chernyshevsky in bitter condemnation of it—all the more bitter, perhaps, because he had continued to hope for so long. And although the peasants were clearly disenchanted with the terms of the Emancipation, which most of them found utterly incomprehensible and many of them thought did not represent the real will of the Tsar, disorders were scattered and did not threaten social stability. Meanwhile, elements of the gentry were showing somewhat more spine than Chernyshevsky had expected—and university students also seemed prepared to defy the government in substantial numbers. The result was that since the peasants did not seem, for the moment, to be reaching for their axes, while individual gentry were at least beginning to formulate demands for political compensation for their economic losses, Chernyshevsky took a less negative view of the political potential of *obshchestvo*. He was encouraged by the ferment among Russian students but was well aware that escalating disorders might trigger reaction, rather than revolution.

Another factor that helped heal the breach between London and St. Petersburg was the attempt to create a revolutionary organization that would unite the diverse oppositional nuclei that now existed throughout the country. This organization was the first Land and Liberty (*Zemlia i volia*). Neither Herzen nor Chernyshevsky seems to have been directly involved in the rather amateurish organizing efforts that went forward in 1861–62.⁴⁷ The lead was taken by Ogarëv in London, and particularly by a number of younger Russian radicals, almost all of whom had close ties to Chernyshevsky. The *Bell*, despite Herzen's ambivalence about creating a conspiratorial organization, was important in defining and publicizing the broader aims of the organization. Chernyshevsky was distracted by the death of Dobroliubov and

weighed down by his obligations to the *Contemporary*. His organizational role appears to have been a very limited one. But of course he had substantially influenced the intellectual formation of young radicals like the Serno-Solovëvich brothers and others of the active organizers, and he certainly rendered advice and support.⁴⁸

The importance of Land and Liberty is largely that of a harbinger. The Central Committee, with its shifting personnel and vague program, never succeeded in creating a national radical network. And with the failure of peasant discontent to grow into major disorder, the exhaustion of the reforming mood of *obshchestvo*, and the government's offensive against the Left in the summer of 1862, such structure as had existed soon collapsed.

Land and Liberty was a transitional organization. Its program was sketchy, its component parts only casually and sporadically in touch; it aimed to unite what already existed, to provide assistance and guidance for the anticipated peasant uprising. The groups that followed upon it were more tightly organized, more intellectually cohesive, more militant, and more turned in upon themselves. Nevertheless, Land and Liberty provided many Russian radicals with their first organizational experience. It also brought the *Bell* and the *Contemporary*—whatever the inner reservations of their editors—back into the arena together, for the last time. The active career of Chernyshevsky ended with his arrest in the summer of 1862, while Herzen's career ended in a long, slow decline. After 1862 his broad, amorphous, and moderate constituency disappeared. Most of "progressive" *obshchestvo* became more conservative and nationalistic in the wake of the insurrection in Russian Poland. Herzen's support for the Polish rebels is often cited to explain his loss of influence over broad strata of public opinion in Russia. No doubt it was important. But in addition the Russian radicalism of the 1860s was dominated by extreme and militant young men and women who idolized Chernyshevsky and repudiated Herzen. The *Bell* had been the organ of the reforming coalition that existed between 1857 and 1862. It had no real base of support in the very different period that followed.